



A NATIONAL DIALOGUE: The **Secretary of Education's Commission** on the **Future of Higher Education**

SUMMARY OF MEETING April 7, 2006, Indianapolis

Articulation, accountability, and assessment were the agenda items of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education during their second day of hearings in Indianapolis. Energized by substantive discussion and goal-setting during a working session the day before, Commissioners and presenters focused on key issues that impact postsecondary education as they consider what their recommendations to the Secretary might encompass. The key questions debated at this session included:

- How can institutional performance be measured?
- How can the quality of teaching and learning at postsecondary institutions be evaluated?

It was apparent that student outcome data is essential to improving success rates and many students, parents, policy makers and others are seeking mechanisms to quantify how institutions of higher learning are serving students.

Commissioners in attendance: Chairman Charles Miller, a private investor; Mr. Nicolas Donofrio of the IBM Corporation; Dr. James J. Duderstadt of the University of Michigan; Ms. Gerri Elliott of Microsoft Corporation; Mr. Jonathan Grayer of Kaplan, Inc; Ms. Kati Haycock of The Education Trust; former Gov. James Hunt of North Carolina; Dr. Arturo Madrid of Trinity University; Ms. Sara Martinez Tucker of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund; Dr. Robert Mendenhall of Western Governors University; Mr. Arthur Rothkopf of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Richard Stephens of The Boeing Company; Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services; Dr. Richard Vedder of Ohio University; Dr. Charles M. Vest of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Dr. David Ward of the American Council on Education; and Dr. Robert M. Zemsky of the University of Pennsylvania. Ex officio members in attendance: William Berry, U.S. Department of Defense; Emily Stover DeRocco, U.S. Department of Labor; Sally L. Stroup, U.S. Department of Education; John Bailey, U.S. Department of Commerce; and Peter Faletra, U.S. Department of Energy.

ARTICULATION

Remarks by Mr. Jay Pfeiffer, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Florida Department of Education

Pfeiffer believes the Nation must take advantage of advances in information and communication technology to improve the productivity and efficiency of colleges and universities. Data and data systems that provide colleges and universities feedback are needed to assess the impact of programs and policies on student performance. Florida's educational data system combines the data from public schools, adult education programs, community colleges, workforce programs, and university programs into a K-20 education data warehouse that serves as a repository for information about education in Florida. "It's considered the Cadillac of state systems," Pfeiffer said. Through Florida's data warehouse, "we provide a very robust high school feedback report that allows every high school to see what happens to its students after they leave," Pfeiffer said. "Every community college, every college can do the same thing." Pfeiffer recommended that other states adopt Florida's data collection system. He also detailed his concern about the federal Family Education Record Protection Act (FERPA) and its potential to limit access to the kind of data states need. In his view, the law should "be administered differently so that we can inform states about practices that build data systems but protect the privacy and confidentiality of those records," he said.

Remarks by Gov. Gaston Caperton, President, College Board

Caperton, who leads a national non-profit organization composed of members from 5,000 colleges, universities and other educational organizations, emphasized the importance of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in helping students bridge the gap between high school and college. AP courses, he said, represent the highest level of academic excellence in high schools and offer an enriched academic experience for high school students. Even though more U.S. students are capable of passing AP courses, a shortage of AP teachers and a lack of encouragement and support to enroll more students thwarts the spread and the appeal of this college prep program. AP math and science students are more likely to continue their studies in these science disciplines when they enter college. “AP has tremendous potential to drive reform in a powerful way in our nation’s schools,” said Caperton. “No single program can have as strong an impact on overall student and teacher quality.” Nearly all AP students attain their postsecondary credentials, he said. He emphasized that “AP is not for the elite, it is for the prepared.”

Remarks by Dr. Peter Joyce, Workforce Development Manager, CISCO Systems

Joyce believes Cisco’s Networking Academy, is doing its part to drive education reform, especially in the IT networking sector. CISCO creates Internet solutions that allow companies and countries to increase productivity. Schools turned to CISCO for assistance in designing and building networks. This e-learning system, which has more than 4,000 programs in the U.S., fosters the development of unprecedented partnership between high schools, community colleges, four-year colleges and community organizations. The academy uses online assessment and tracks individual performance. Course content is standardized and aligned with industry certification. Many of the training centers and regional academies provide technical support to their school partners. This program also introduces students to the sequence of learning necessary for careers in the IT networking industry. Partnerships like this, between industry and education institutions, are critical, he said.

Remarks by Mr. Richard Kazis, Senior Vice President, Jobs for the Future

Kazis is an advocate of small schools that combine secondary and post secondary learning. These high schools grant both a high school diploma and an associate’s degree (AA) or allow students to compile significant credits toward an AA degree. Kazis told the Commission that the availability of student outcome data proved valuable, and added, “Being academically unprepared to succeed in higher education is among the strongest predictors of failure in college—more so than socioeconomic status, race or gender.” Introducing college courses in high school would strengthen the signals that high school students and teachers get regarding what it

takes to succeed in college. Kazis believes that “having an Associate degree program in high school is a wonderful way to build confidence in students who are not yet considering going to college—improving access, lowering attrition and lowering costs.”

ACCOUNTABILITY

Remarks by Dr. Peter Ewell, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management

Ewell, a 25-year veteran of education policy issues, said he has been involved with assessment and accountability conversations at every possible level including: the federal government, 28 states, all of the regional accrediting organizations and more than 400 institutions. He favors full disclosure of data that measures how well a college is educating its students. “I think accreditors, and they’re coming pretty close to this now, should publicly disclose those results or should at least have the institutions publicly disclose those results,” he said. Ewell also emphasized that it is a national priority to provide more young adults “a credential of world class quality.” He recommended that colleges and universities benchmark academic performance to an external standard. “It is incumbent upon institutions to show they are measuring up to something that is other than what their faculty says is the level,” he said.

Remarks by Dr. Roger Benjamin, President, Council for Aid to Education, RAND Corporation and Dr. Stephen P. Klein, Senior Research Scientist, RAND Corporation

Benjamin and Klein offered a joint presentation to the Commission regarding the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) test. Klein outlined what he called, a basic principal in testing: “what you test and how you test influences what teachers teach and students learn.” He acknowledged that “colleges have different missions; students have different majors,” and it “would be ridiculous to suggest that one measure . . . is going to assess all the things that higher education strives to achieve.” Nonetheless, he stressed that some things can be measured, like writing, critical thinking and problem solving and that these skills are ones that all schools try to teach their students. The benefit of tests like the CLA are that they can “identify effective practices [at institutions] to improve learning and instructions. They have to assess important skills that are relevant to what students need. The test has to be fair. It has to be given under standardized conditions. And it has to be cost effective.” Benjamin noted to the Commission that several different schools are utilizing the Collegiate Learning Assessment model in a variety of ways, including analysis of individual student test scores and as part of comparative research projects.

Remarks by Dr. George K. Kuh, Director, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University

On the topic of accountability, Kuh told the Commission “We need to know how students spend their time and what an institution devotes their resources to in order to meaningfully connect test scores and outcome measures, with the learning activities associated with the scores.” He cited two instruments—the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)—that specifically question student engagement. Results show that the “more time students spend studying, the more they learn. The more they practice and get feedback, the better the quality of their educational experience.” The NSSE and CCSSE, used in some form in many state systems, look at the nature of student interactions with teachers inside and outside the classroom. Once they get the data, instructors can immediately address areas where students are not performing well. “This will help us learn more about the teaching and learning practices that work better in different kinds of settings, with different kinds of students,” Kuh said.

Remarks by Dr. Peter McPherson, President, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC)

McPherson agreed that the accountability issue for post secondary education is complex and multifaceted. He did acknowledge, however, that some manner of competency measurement “does make sense . . . that a voluntary system looking at some expectation or variance by mission is out there. We are strongly against a federally mandated system.” McPherson also noted a close working relationship with the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, which advises the Secretary of Education on matters related to accreditation and to the eligibility process of institutions of higher learning. He announced to the Commission that NASULGC will begin working on a voluntary system of accountability within its membership. Even during the first year at the helm of NASULGC McPherson is “very serious about, as leader of NASULGC, getting this issue within the Academy,” McPherson said.

Remarks by Ms. Anne Neal, President, American Council of Trustees and Alumni

Neal asked the Commission to consider what students are learning and what institutions are teaching. “Students today, in too many cases, receive an education in name only,” Neal said. “Nowadays, virtually unlimited choice has supplanted the concept of a rigorous general education.” Almost one third of the institutions surveyed had no specific writing requirement, she said, citing additional statistics: Only 38 percent required a course in mathematics; 38 percent failed to require a natural

or physical science; not one demanded that its students study economics; a mere 14 percent of the colleges compel their students to study American government or history; and 24 percent do not require a foreign language. Curriculum choices should not reflect “the momentary tastes of 19 year olds,” said Neal, who complained of a shift away from the more difficult fields, math and science, towards those fields with easier grading, the humanities and social sciences. “Who is in charge?” asks Neal. “Who is minding the store?” She said trustees are partly to blame for lapses in institutional accountability because too many do not fulfill their fiduciary duties and the Academy views them as meddlers. She said the situation dilutes the effectiveness of citizen oversight. “Lay governance is designed to bring the informed perspective of citizens to the very heart of the university,” she said. “If we are to remain the best higher education system in the world, trustees must address the key issues of cost, quality, and accountability and do so without being intimidated by academic insiders.”

Remarks by Mr. Kevin Carey, Research and Policy Manager, The Education Sector

“The achievement gaps in K-12 education not only persist into higher education but actually, in some subjects, grow larger by the time students finish,” said Carey, a manager for Education Sector, a new non-partisan education policy think-tank located in Washington, D.C. This is why “the Commission should strongly support opportunities to leverage the potential of information technology to understand more about our colleges and universities.” He recommended that the National Center for Education Statistics create a unit record system of collecting higher education data. “It is unrealistic to expect that every college and university will provide all of the needed information about themselves voluntarily, data that puts them in a less than flattering light in the market place,” Carey said. “But disclosure of vital information about higher education quality should be mandatory and not optional.”